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ABSTRACT

The articles in this journal issue provide information on the study and teaching of folklore. Separate articles discuss the following topics: oral history; the teaching of folklore in Texas secondary schools and colleges, both as a separate discipline and as supporting enrichment material; a term project assignment in a college-level American folklore class; folklore as a critical approach to fiction; and an extracurricular project in which Albany, Texas, high school students have researched the past of their region and written about it in "Old Timer," a student publication similar in concept to "Foxfire." Also included in the journal issue are an interview in which William A. Owens, a folklorist, fiction and nonfiction writer, and teacher, talks about writing and publishing; a list of works included in an exhibit about East Texas literature; a bibliography of works on various aspects of using folklore in the classroom, from elementary through university and adult education levels; and an annotated list of ten folklore textbooks currently in use at the college level. (GT)

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His English in TEXAS

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Spring 1980

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Focus on Folklore

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About the cover: "They passed this way" was drawn by artist and English professor Harry Hanks, University of Texas at Arlington, as a Bicentennial Tribute to the Texas Folklore Society.

George L. Kittredge, in the preface to the 1916 publication of the Texas Folklore Society, wrote: "[Folklore] is a recognized branch of historical, and anthropological science, and the psychologist is beginning to discover [it]." And he added, "for the songs and stories and sayings that make up the traditional code and oral literature of the people, Texas is a happy hunting ground." But it was J. Frank Dobie, who, in 1922, established a model of what "folklore is, how one collects it, and how it fits into a broader pattern of cultural studies."

Legends of Texas speaks for Dobie's model—a collection of tales of lost mines, of buried treasures and accursed gold, of bad men and wild women, of deer with mad stones, of the lobo, the coyote, the mustang. For he was a teller of tales himself, an archetypal "wise old man." In his classroom, we sat hushed and expectant as he strolled in, Stetson flung atop the shaggy white head, white shirt with long tear in the sleeve, shapeless trousers, down-at-the-heel boots that had spent long days walking the land he loved. He would begin to tell a story, but always the implication was that, if we looked about us, we too could find stories to tell. He had us read Wordsworth, for the master Romantic offered the way for the "Southwesterner to have the land to soak into him." He told us we would never understand local lore until we had absorbed the "noble and beautiful and wise literature to which all people are inheritors." He was "on fire with the idea that genuine literature in this part of the world would come about only from an understanding of its life, lore, and history."

Editor

Focus on Folklore

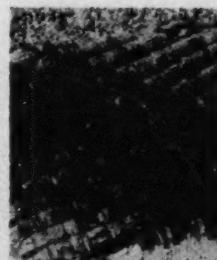
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William A. Owens



Literary East Texas



My Secret

The World of Editing and Publishing: A Conversation with William A. Owens

Dr. Owens, as a folklorist, nonfiction writer, novelist, and writing teacher, you have written and published many books. How does one get started in the publishing world?

Well, it was a long, hard road for me. You know it depends so much on the kind of material a person has, the ability he or she has to write, to use imagination.

One of my very successful students is a young man named Richard Price. He wrote two novels; one was called *The Wanderers* and the second, *Blood Brothers*. He was all of twenty-four when he published the first and he made a sackful of money on it. Paperback, movie, everything of the sort. What interested me was that after this great success, his editor and his agent both suggested that he come and take my course to begin writing the second one. After he had been in the class a little while, I found out why: they wanted him to avoid the pitfall of writing the second novel so it sounded exactly like the first. And this can happen.

For a number of writers, it has been impossible to move on. When they got started on the second novel, they found themselves rewriting the first in form, or in content or in approach. In this case, Price was writing about the same kind of society, the same kind of background situation. I could see in his first chapters why they were steering him away from the first novel. He was not actually able to finish the second novel in my class, but he did finish it. He is now approaching the age of 30. Imagine doing two novels—two successful ones—in that length of time. But he has done this.

Harper Lee worked for years on *To Kill a Mocking Bird* before she got it in shape for publication. Price did his almost entirely, if not entirely, on his own. Harper Lee had the help and encourage-

ment of a very sympathetic agent who took her material when it was actually more like a series of sketches, parts of a novel, and worked with her, helping her to put it into a form. Obviously, you know the success of the novel. Harper Lee said quite frankly that the novel would never have come off had it not been for the agent. She gave him full credit for his assistance in it. So there are two examples. In my case, I was forty-three when I published my first commercial book.

If a student wants to work with nonfiction and to publish, what is the best avenue to pursue? Is it to take courses? to write? to find an agent? What channel should he or she follow?

There are as many channels as there are in the Mississippi as it runs into the Gulf. I think, actually, the first thing is to have material he wants to deal with. If he has that and will simply try to set it down, he is on his way. I doubt if an agent is going to look at the material very seriously until the student has gone over a few hurdles. Of course, he can get an agent who will charge him for reading the manuscript, but that, in my opinion, is too often not a satisfactory operation. For example, he may be a long way from the agent and what they do is by correspondence. It is very hard for the nuances of the problems to come out in letters. Letters are hard to write, and the agent may not charge enough to be able to afford spending the time to give him the kind of advice he actually needs. I feel that he is just as well off to go into a writing class where he gets not only good advice on the quality of the writing and ways to improve it but also experienced advice from the teacher. I've come to believe that the teacher of writing should be one who has already gone through the

hard knocks, who has published, and who has some sense of the problems of getting published. With as much publication as we now have, we ought to be able to find teachers who have published, who have encountered agents, editors, and can tell the students something about the approach—the steps toward publication. The student must start out with good material, write as well as he can, rewrite, and try to catch somebody's attention.

What characteristics must a person have in order to succeed as a writer?

Talent is a very important one: on a scale of 1 to 100, inspiration is down about 10 or so, because the inspiration comes after having tackled the problem and after you have had a kind of breakthrough on it. And then, the writer has to have the verve, the emotional energy, to write.

How does one develop the discipline to write, let's say a book length nonfiction work?

There are two or three things there. First of all is his desire to write it, to prove to himself that it can be done. There is constantly this self-approval involved in writing. Sometimes it is too strong an element, so that the person approves himself so much that he does not want anyone else to question what he has done. Then he is in trouble. The fact of the matter is, the writer is going to have to work with agents, editors, and publishers, and they are going to have some ideas also about what the work should be, whether fiction or nonfiction. In the writing of a novel, there can be either a friendly relationship from the beginning in which the editor admires the author's work and the author respects the editor's expertise as well as his integrity,

or an unfriendly one. The best editor is not going to rewrite anything; he is going to make suggestions. The inspiration, then, is way down the line; the need for money may be a motivating force that moves him along more than it should. I came at a point along the way to realize that it hurt more not to write than to write, and then I could sit down and write. I have, for years, had to be a very disciplined person.

I try to be at the typewriter by 7:30 in the morning; take a break at 9:30 for coffee, then write until 11:00 or 11:30. And I'm through for the day. But if I do that day after day, the material increases until I have something to look at. I can then review it and decide what I should do to go on. But it is that absolute determination to stick to it.

On the writing of fiction, I think the best quotation I've ever heard was a statement made by Carson McCullers to a writer's club: "Elimination comes, after having worked." That has been my motto, and I've tried to pass it on to students. They suddenly catch on that this is true because they try to write a story and it doesn't come and they get very discouraged with it, but then they work at it for a while and suddenly some ideas begin to break through and the language begins to shape up and they realize that working has paid off.

It seems that so many people face the blank page syndrome. They sit at the typewriter for hours, but the ideas don't come. How can one get around this?

Oh, there are numerous cures for that as I tell my students. First of all, the blank page is going to remain a blank page until one puts something on it. It is better to type "The brown fox jumped over the lazy dog" over and over than not to type anything. Or better still, "Now is



William A. Owens

the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country." That one I can type without even thinking about it I've done it so many times. What I've found, if I sit down at the typewriter and face a blank page for longer than should be, is to start doing one of two things. I simply start writing—any way at all related to the thing I'm trying to do, not worrying about sentences, words, punctuation, or any of the things that I would do in a second revision. So I write to try to get movement going. And it is very hard to do sometimes. But if one sticks with it long enough, there will be some flow. The blank page has something on it and then you come to a point of stoppage in the development. Go back and type over what you have done. Another good trick

is never to end a day's work with a completed chapter, or paragraph, or even a sentence. When you sit down at the typewriter the next morning, you can usually get started easily. By the time one has finished the sentence left he had not finished the day before, he is into the work. It works for me.

The block is endemic with writers, so you have to do something to work around it. I don't think reading the newspaper is going to help or reading a magazine, but one might read something closely related to the subject, perhaps source material related to the project. I've written at this point three novels: everything else has been nonfiction. In each case, I've had a subject to deal with. That has helped a great deal.

You are presently working on a non-fiction project on Texas folklore, are you not?

Yes, I am working with a place, Texas, and a time, 100 years into the Anglo-Texas experience. I am working with song, story, and language: how people respond emotionally. I've had the experience of just publishing a collection of Texas songs and stories, but that is not enough. I have more to do and this is what I am involved with now.

In *Not So Far Away, Not So Long Ago: Texas and Texans in Song and Story*, I am dealing with material that is deeply ingrained in all of us. I feel that I should try to say what I can about it, what the people have preserved, and wherever I can, why they have preserved it.

Were you working with any kind of a conscious structure in mind when you were writing the book?

This is the most difficult part. In nonfiction, I think you have an even tougher job of organization than you do in fiction, because in fiction there is a narrative to carry you forward. I wrote this first as a straight narration, carrying the story through the college years, on to graduate school, while teaching, up and down all kinds of backwoods trails. I had recorded all sorts of things over the years—sound, story, language—to have available when the time came to use them in a book. The research was carried out over a long period because I had to record information as I could afford time and money. I was teaching at Texas A&M; on a weekend, I could get as far away as Crockett; on a short vacation, to the Big Thicket.

I turned the draft in to the editors and got it back; what had happened was that it was impossible to deal very logically and fully with the material of one ethnic group if I was moving from here to there. My chief reader on that draft and others was Jacques Barzun; he was very unhappy about my "college days report." He wrote in the margin something about the "insipidity of American college students." So with that in the background, I turned to the structure of dealing with the various groups. I dealt first with the Anglo-Saxons, then the Afro-Americans because they were the two largest groups I had to deal with, then followed through with the others. Always, time gives a sense of continuity and I used the flow of time to keep in the reader's mind that Texas became a multicultural state. It is not like the cultural groupings in the city because the community exists geograph-

ically. It is possible to keep a group together in Texas where they could not be kept together in a city because of a spilling over. I have separated the treatment of different groups into chapters with transitional paragraphs between them, usually going back to a personal experience I've had in dealing with the group. I have been told by my editors that the organizational structure works.

What sort of interviewing technique did you use?

Well, I was brought up in Pin Hook and I knew these people. I just sat down and let people talk. I told them who I was, what I was doing, and they, in most cases, accepted me quite readily.

I had only one unusual and unpleasant experience the whole time in southeast Texas with the Redbones. They are a curious mixture of French, Indian, and Black. The result is a very interesting appearing people but they are also a very private people and they don't like intruders of any sort, so I never got a recording from them.

How will you know when the work is finished? How do you know when to turn a manuscript loose?

There comes a time when you know yourself that you have to turn it loose for better or worse because there is just nothing more that you can do with it.

As you know, I have been working on *Not So Far Away* for a long time. The time has come that it must be turned loose. It is a loss for me not to turn it loose because it is now delaying other work that is boiling up. I have come to the end of the songs I want to include and the range of experience. When I have nothing more I want to say about these, I will stop. I still have a concluding section to write. And that is going to be just as difficult as the introduction because it is going to be a tying together of the whole work. I am determined to spend three months straightening out all the notes; I believe I can do that in three months.

What techniques can the nonfiction writer borrow from the writer of fiction to keep the work interesting?

The nonfiction writer can borrow the use of anecdotes; he can borrow the provocative statement. Sometimes a piece of dialogue can be used. The nonfiction writer can use all of the elements of the immediate scene. He can use sight, taste, smell, etc., to bring the reader close to

the situation.

What about when converting a nonfiction work to fiction?

There are various things that the writer can bring in: outside situations, emotions, incidents, figures. These elements can be used to distort what is actual and to improve the variety and add to the reality of the fictional account.

Many are not aware of the breadth of opportunity that is open to the writer to choose, to shape, to reshape all of the elements of life that he wants to work with. Life becomes like a plastic material that the writer can mold and shape, taking off some, bringing more in. When the prospective writer begins to see that, he may also begin to see something of the form of writing.

It is interesting that a person's tendency, when he picks up a piece of any kind of soft material, whether it is silly putty or chewing gum, is to first roll it into a ball. It is just sort of natural for us to achieve some sort of form like that. Whether writing fiction or nonfiction, the writer must do some shaping of the material.

When writing a nonfictional account of personal experiences, the writer must select very carefully the details and necessarily leave out a great deal because the narrative will not carry the weight of too much material. Leaving out is a form of distortion, though, and the writer has to be aware of that. With too much distortion, the nonfictional account becomes fiction.

What steps should a person follow to publication once a manuscript has been completed?

This is a very tough problem. The writer is first of all going to have to prepare a manuscript that will not throw the first reader off. It must be a good looking manuscript. The author's name must be on it and he must retain a copy of it. Second, the author is going to have to decide where and how he is going to submit it.

Let's say it is a short story. There is no point in trying to go to an agent with a short story. If the agent should market the story and sell it, I believe the maximum for a short story in *Atlantic Monthly* is \$200; for *Esquire*, the beginning writer may get as much as \$600. *Playboy* pays more. The beginning writer is much more likely to end up in a quarterly somewhere or other and very few of those pay.

For a scholarly book the procedure is different.

In this case the writer would work directly with the publisher because agents like to handle scholarly books only when they are by writers who are going to make money on other books. Agents are very hard to come by now because reading is a great chore. It requires a lot of time and expense. Formerly, the world looked down on the agent who charged a reading fee. I find that increasingly even the best of the agents are requiring a reading fee of some sort. The agency charging the reading fee is likely to be serious and to give the author a good evaluation of the manuscript at that rate so the fee may be worth it.

For a novel, the writer may well want to work with an agent. I have had at this point four agents: two very good, two I was ready to leave. One of them I left the first day; one of them a little further along. I did have the great good fortune to be with the Maurice Crane and Annie Laurie Williams Agency for twenty-five years and they saw me through a number of books; they worked very hard at it.

I think it is inadvisable to send to the agents who advertise in *The Writer* or *The Saturday Review* or any other place because the agents who advertise are probably making their money reading manuscripts and returning them.

One of my friends did work for such an agency; it was not only an agency, but a teaching agency. Well, they had a lot of mimeographed form letters; they would look at the manuscript, decide which form letter should go back, and let it go, and that was all the person had for the money. And they charged high rates. So writers must be wary of the agents who advertise.

A list of approved agents is available from the Society of Author's Representatives. The author can write to these individuals: he may get responses from none, several, or whatever; it depends upon the kind of letters he writes and the kind of potential as a writer the agent judges him to be from the letter.

Once you get a good agent, make him be nice to you but you be just as nice to him. The agent earns his money: he reads the manuscript, he makes suggestions; you rewrite; he makes suggestions again, until he feels that it is time for the book to be sent to an editor. And even then he continues an interest in it as manuscript until it is finished. Then the agent continues another kind of interest—the commercial interest: he will see to it

that he will get as much advertising and promotion as he possibly can out of the publisher. The agent can help a great deal with advertising and promotion, but the help with the writing is the most important.

I mentioned earlier the story of Harper Lee and her agent and the writing of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She was from Monroeville, Alabama, and had been a law school student, had made a lawyer of herself. She went to New York, and to support herself, she worked in a Double-day bookshop. Evenings, she wrote on her manuscript. She went to Maurice Crane, my agent; he knew that she had something. But what she had was a bundle of sketches and parts of skits and descriptions and things like that; and she simply didn't know how to put it together into a book; so, he worked with her, I guess a full year. While she rewrote, he read and made helpful suggestions. The first publishing house he sent it to took it; and the book obviously did very well. I've heard her say many times that if it had not been for Maurice Crane that book would never have been published. So the agent does have a great role to play in the writer's life.

When the author is writing a scholarly book, is it preferable to obtain a publisher before the work is completed or once the book is done? What preliminary planning should be done toward publication?

What is in the mind all the time is the hope, even the expectation that the work is going to be published. It used to be that one could submit a synopsis and even three chapters of a book and get it published. And this still happens in certain cases. But now the editor is likely to write back, "We find this interesting, but we will need to see the whole manuscript before we make a decision." You might as well write the whole manuscript in the first place.

I would say that when a person gets far enough in writing to have some sense of time of completion, extent of book, and all the elements that go into publishing, that he might send off letters to the publishers he would be interested in dealing with and say: this is what I'm working on. Do you have some interest in it? And then the letters will come back yes or no.

As a follow up to the letter, the author can ask if the publisher would like to see something of the work he has done, a synopsis.

The author can send as many letters of inquiry as he likes. When the book goes out, it is standard practice to send it to only one publisher at a time.

I did have a student use this same approach with a novel last spring at Columbia. The student began a novel on the first day of class; eight weeks later he had it sold to Harcourt Brace. Instead of submitting anything, he wrote a half-dozen letters to editors describing the book he was doing.

Occasionally an author will get a novel published without going through an agent. These are called books that come in over the transom; most go out just about the same way. In fact, some publishers say they do not accept more than 1% of the books that come in that way and they would rather not spend time and money to read them, so they package them up and send them back.

If a writer goes through an agent, it is entirely different. Publishers do not dare not look at a manuscript sent by an agent because they must interact with that agent for a long time and they trust the agent's judgment.

What about the writer's commitment when the rejection slips come back?

There is a story that I want to tell you because I want you to feel that everybody who has a story to tell, and that includes most of us, can tell that story if he or she is willing to put in the time and energy for it. This is a story that is very close to me and I feel very strongly about it.

One day I was in my office: a black man with graying hair and a crippled leg came in the door. He told me that he had been to see Miss Leone Adams, the poet, because he wanted to enroll in a writing class. She taught poetry only. He wanted to work with fiction so she had sent him to me with a note saying that she thought this man had something, but she did not know how to advise him. I talked with him a little while, and I found out that he was the janitor in one of the Columbia University buildings, and his wife was the telephone operator in the same building. Because Columbia gives all the employees of the university who have reached appointive positions free tuition for taking courses, the man was seeking to enroll. Here was this man who was past sixty from North Carolina with a chance to take a course in writing, this man who had always wanted a course in writing. I asked him to bring in the manuscript.

He brought in the worst I have ever

seen, I do believe; it was a terrible manuscript. The man was functionally illiterate. He simply put periods where they looked good and commas the same way. His spelling was out of some other world, not the one that I knew. He had no sense of paragraphing; he had just strung the story out. But there was one thing in it, and that was a strong narrative sense. His name was Alfred Wilkes. So I told him to come ahead and we'd do what we could.

My writing class was made up of about fifteen or sixteen people; very bright, very able young men and women and I was putting this man in among them. He said he wanted to write a novel. I said fine, and he worked for nearly a year writing a novel which he called *Blood on the Magnolia*. The title was partly indicative of the sort of novel that he was writing. In some spots, the book was just as bad as the title. Again, there were some powerful passages. It was set in Louisiana and there was one passage in which there was confrontation between whites and blacks that was very powerfully done. I knew it wouldn't go, but he was so eager to have something published, that I sent it to my editor, Burroughs Mitchell, at Scribner's, who wrote him a very nice letter and told him that this one wouldn't go, but maybe the next one would.

This man, who had left school at about ten years of age, by the age of fifteen, was on the road as a prize fighter in round robin fights. I don't know whether you know them—they're not done anymore, are they? They're terrible fights; they put say six men in a ring, and the one who lasted longest was the one who got the purse. And what the men would do was sort of team up on one and slug him until he out and he was gone, and that would improve their chances; they would go on that way until one of them got the money. And he was at this until he was close to forty. By then he was almost punch drunk and he became a janitor. So he wrote a novel about prize fighting. It was better than *Blood on the Magnolia* in many, many ways; he had learned a lot. And we sent this to the same editor; he sent it back, not quite good enough, but then again the editor encouraged him to keep on trying.

One morning, in the third year I guess it was, he came in to me and said he absolutely could not think of anything to write. Just nothing there. Would I tell him something to write. So, what do you say? Finally I said, tell me a story about when you were ten years old. Well, the next day he came in with the beginning

of a novel, and the first line was as it came to him the first time:

"At the age of nine, I became a man."

He read the first chapter to the class: they were extremely enthusiastic about it. We went on I guess for several months with him, working steadily, and then the time had come to try it again. He said he was writing it as a children's book; well it wasn't exactly like that, but it wasn't exactly an adult book so we sent it to the children's book editor at Scribner's, because he had his friend Mitchell there. She called him and told him that there were lots of things she liked about it; she would like to consider it more, so we waited and waited and then we got word they were going to offer a contract. Word spread around the campus fast and our newsmen told it to McCandlish Phillips of the *New York Times* who came over for an interview and it was really one of the most understanding interviews I've sat in on. The man was completely sympathetic; he wanted to do this in such a way that the author's natural dignity would show. It came out a two-column story in the *New York Times*. It was published I guess the next day; then there was a call from NBC. They wanted to do a story on this, a biographical story for the 6:00 news. So they came, and while NBC reporters were there, the call came from Scribner's telling him not only that they were guaranteeing the contract but that they wanted to pay him some money now.

So there was rejoicing all over my office, because by this time everybody was involved. Both the camera and reporter crew spent the day, and I have never seen a man so thoroughly interviewed. They spent the morning in my office talking to him, talking to me about the mechanics of the class; everything of the sort; that afternoon they stayed through the whole class, through the reading and the discussion of the various stories. Each time that he would comment they would catch him and make some frames of it so at the end they simply asked members of the class who knew him well to talk to him about what it was like to be a black man functionally illiterate in this situation. And, his statement was absolutely magnificent. It was humble, it was kind, it was just everything that you would like to hear.

So the book went into production. One afternoon I got a call from the editor saying that she had just finished editing the book and she had straightened out all the periods and commas and everything

of the sort and she thought it was now ready to go. Well, I was just horrified. I knew her well; I knew that she was a very sincere person, but I felt that this was not so good. But I sort of worried about it through the night; the next morning I had barely got to my desk when the telephone rang; she was on the telephone; she said, "My conscience hurt me all night. I'm restoring the manuscript as it was and we are going ahead with that." So, they did.

He got some excellent reviews—publicity—from all over; you could pick up newspapers; I did in Little Rock, Arkansas, and places like that and there was Alfred Wilkes and his book, which he called *Little Boy Black*, being reviewed; the story being told and so on. So this man, who by this time must have been sixty-five and past, put down something out of his own experience and made it a powerful piece of work. I know that if he could do that, that you people who are struggling around with words and semicolons and lack of semicolons and so on, can also overcome your problems. You don't have to depend upon an editor.

One of the things about *Little Boy Black* is its great sense of humor. One of the characters is a black man who lives outside of town, alone, in a hut, so the boy goes down to see him often; and one day he says to him, "What would you do if you had a dollar bill, all the dollar bills you wanted?" He says, "Well, if I had all I wanted, I'd stick one here, and I'd stick one here, and I'd hang one here, and I'd lay one here, and then I would just sit there and reach out and get me one from here, and one from here, and . . ." It has this kind of folk charm that is marvelous. He wrote the next novel: sent it off—he felt an absolute loyalty to his black situation so he sent it to a black publishing house. No word, no word, time passed and it turned out that they had lost his only manuscript. And after all my telling him that he should have more than one copy. So he faithfully set to work trying to reproduce that novel again. I heard from him, I guess it's been six months ago now and he was still holding on to that novel, hoping to bring it out.

I consider this a proper kind of commitment to writing. He knew that he had something to say; he knew he had to say it. He was willing to make adjustments if they were necessary; he was willing to learn that sometimes the other fellow had a new or different insight into what he was trying to say and the whole experience was a very happy one indeed.

It's a complete story, isn't it? ♣

The History Nobody Wanted

My subject is oral history, which, because it lacks the quality of authenticity most of us associate with the written word, is the poor cousin of the history family. Until recently, I too was condescending about the validity of working with oral materials. Then in 1976 I had occasion to meet and interview at length two old men who as thirty and eighteen-year-old brothers had been part of a gang of bank and train robbers between 1919 and 1924. Just on the level of simple narrative, the material that Willis and Joe Newton were giving me was so compelling that I wanted to study it. Furthermore, when I began to face the problem of organizing their story into a presentable form, and choosing a medium for the presentation, and verifying dates and places by searching city and county FBI records, a vivid picture of the past and of two characters who inhabited it began to emerge. Soon I was off and running on the work that eventually became a thirty minute documentary film, *The Newton Boys: Portrait of an Outlaw Gang*.

Even as my respect for the study of oral material grew, I learned that my condescension earlier was the result of simple ignorance. Besides the well known oral projects such as that which produced the journal, *Foxfire*, there is an extensive collection of orally generated material on theater arts at SMU in Dallas, as well as a great deal of information on "The Popular Arts" and on "Children and TV Programming" at Columbia University. At Texas Tech one can find "The Texas Crime Collection" on file, and I understand someone in Texas has an ongoing project to gather the stories of all survivors of the Bataan Death March. The subject matter which can be found in such collections is a nearly inexhaustible source of ideas for novelists, short story writers, filmmakers, poets, and students of literature. Whether traditional historians will

agree that such stories are worthy of consideration remains debatable.

In my own mind, there is no question that the Newton boys' narrative can be seen as history in a fairly narrow and explicit sense. In the first place, they are clearly descended from their nineteenth century outlaw forebears in both their world view and their methodology. Of course the availability of land was a tremendously important formative influence on the character of this country. We tend to forget, though, that the fact of space in the West which made individualists out of early Americans also cut off such single-minded individuals from one another and one town from another, rendering them all vulnerable in the earliest days to attacks from Indians, and later to being preyed upon by marauders such as the Jameses or Daltons. In their documentary film, the Newtons explain quite candidly that their method was to spot a town of two to five thousand people for their robberies. Such a place, experience taught them, was big enough to have a reasonable amount of money in the local bank, yet small enough to be cowed by a group of brazen men working in the dead of a cold, unpleasant winter night.

Besides using the fact of space between towns in the 1920s, the Newtons also took advantage of the state of the technology at that time. Basic to the success of their operation was their ability to isolate a town for a number of hours or perhaps for as much as an entire day by virtue of the relatively simple operation of locating the telephone office and cutting the wires leading to and from it. The state of the technology limited their activities too, though. Willis, the leader of the group, admits in the film that he had to look for square safes to blow up with nitroglycerin, since "screw" safes in which the door literally "screws" or turns into the wall of the vault were impene-

trable to the tools he had available.

I do not wish to be drawn into a lengthy dispute over the historical value of the Newton boys' material. More interesting by far is the pedagogical point which working on the project drove home for me. Perhaps more than any other information I have ever worked with, the immediacy and the ephemerality of what has been orally preserved challenged me to make difficult decisions now about the long term value of my subjects' data. As I glance backward at work I have done previously, or as I skim the bibliographies of what is being done currently, it seems to me that too often what we English professors do ourselves (and as a consequence find we are doing with our students) when we hammer out a little essay on moon imagery in *Midsummer Night's Dream* or on the function of architecture in Stanley Kubrick's social satire is produce and encourage production of mere journalism. We "write for the day, for instant consumption, knowing [our] wares have to be sold now or never because they will all be stale tomorrow" (Walter Kaufmann, *The Future of The Humanities*. New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1977).

If, on the other hand, a teacher is able to put a student to work recording and organizing the data gathered from a local poet or a writer of children's stories, or from one of the founders of the historical society, or the community storyteller, or an individual who first settled in the community and helped develop a city water system, that student will have to confront and solve every problem associated with doing primary research. The excitement generated by doing something which is genuinely fresh cannot be overstated, nor I believe, can the kind of learning which takes place be duplicated. I make no claim for the interest value of being different merely for the sake of difference. But those of us in humanities are challenged to teach young people to recognize uniqueness and originality and to cherish such qualities in themselves and in others. Here let it be clearly said that we teach originality most truly when we demonstrate it in our own thought, in our behavior, and in our writing.

Oral history, then, the history nobody wanted, cries out to be heard, to be preserved. By our involvement in oral history we may be able to force ourselves to be more nearly visionary, to be less the "servant[s] of the moment" in Nietzsche's terminology, and more nearly "redeemer[s] from the moment" as Kaufmann writes. ♦



Jean Paul Baptiste Yvonne Fippany was a chicken-wagon man and proud of it. For twelve years he had drifted about on the sandy land roads of northeast Texas, northern Louisiana and southern Arkansas. He observed no holiday season, or he considered all his days one long holiday; summer and winter, spring and fall, his red-wheeled, white-topped wagon rolled on. (Benefield, Barry. *Chicken-Wagon Family*. New York: Century, 1925.)

Literary East Texas is a photographic exhibit that features twenty-five authors from East Texas, an area ranging from Honey Grove to Galveston. Fred Tarpley, Chairman of the Department of Literature and Languages at East Texas State University, was director of the project.

"This exhibit should help East Texans develop pride in the literature that has been produced in the region as well as rediscover some neglected writers," Dr. Tarpley said. "The novels treat oil, cotton, economic hardships, and a variety of human conflicts, with concentration on rural settings and only recent attention given to urban East Texas. A common theme seems to be that of the self-made man or woman who struggles to rise above humble beginnings in East Texas."

The one hundred and twenty photographs in the exhibit were chosen from some sixteen hundred photographs taken by Nell Blakely, photography professor at ETSU, who traveled some four thousand miles to match scenes from the novels with actual locales. "Despite hurricane rains, chigger-infested cemeteries, disappointments in discovering that buildings had been razed, and amazement at how quickly the East Texas landscape has changed," Tarpley reports that he is pleased with the spirit of the twenty-five writers captured in the exhibition.

Literary East Texas was funded in part by the Texas Committee for the Humanities, the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English, the East Texas Historical Association and ETSU. Exhibitions may be arranged through Tarpley at ETSU or through the Texas Committee for the Humanities. The authors and books included in the exhibit are the following:

Francis E. Abernethy (Nacogdoches). *Tales from the Big Thicket*. Austin: UT-Austin Press, 1961.

Karle Wilson Baker (Nacogdoches). *Family Style*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1937.

Barry Benefield (Jefferson). *Valiant Is the Word for Carrie* (setting is Jefferson, referred to as Crebillion, La., in novel). New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935; *Chicken Wagon Family*. New York: Century, 1925.

William Brammer (Austin). *The Gay Place*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961.

J. Mason Brewer (Commerce and Austin). *Dog Ghosts*. Austin: UT-Austin Press, 1958; *The Word on the Brazos*. Austin: UT-Austin Press, 1953.

Sigman Byrd (Blanket, Brown County). *The Redlander* (setting is Big Thicket). New York: Dutton, 1939.

East Texas

- Madison Cooper (Waco). *Sironia, Texas*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952.
- Ruth Cross (Sylvan). *The Big Road*. New York: Longmans, 1931.
- Jewel Gibson (Corsicana) *Joshua Beene and God* (setting is Conroe). New York: Random House, 1946; *Black Gold*. New York: Random House, 1950.
- William Goyen (Hollywood, Ca.). *The House of Breath* (setting is Trinity). New York: Random House, 1949.
- Ben K. Green (Cumby). *Horse Tradin'*. New York: Knopf, 1971; *The Last Cattle Drive Through Downtown Dallas*. Flagstaff: Northland Press, 1971.
- Elizabeth Forsythe Hailey (California). *A Woman of Independent Means* (setting is Honey Grove and Dallas). New York: Viking, 1978.
- Leon Hale (Houston). *Bonney's Place*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1971. *Turn South at the Second Bridge*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1965.
- William Humphrey (Clarksville). *Home from the Hill*. New York: Knopf, 1958; *The Ordways*. New York: Knopf, 1965.
- Siddie Joe Johnson (Dallas). *New Town in Texas* (setting is Denison). New York: Longmans, 1942.
- Elithe Hamilton Kirkland (Austin). *Love Is a Wild Assault* (setting is Potter's Point on Caddo Lake). New York: Doubleday, 1959.
- Laura Krey (Galveston). . . . *And Tell of Time* (setting is a Lower Brazos plantation). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938; *On the Long Tide*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940.
- Suzanne Morris (Houston). *Galveston*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1976.
- Hermes Nye (Dallas). *Sweet Beast, I Have Gone Prowling*. Dallas: Cross-Timbers Press, 1972.
- William A. Owens (Pin Hook, Lamar County). *This Stubborn Soil*. New York: Viking, 1941.
- George Sessions Perry (Rockdale, Milam County). *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*. New York: Viking, 1941.
- Garland Roark (Nacogdoches). *Drill a Crooked Hole* (setting is the oil fields in Longview-Kilgore area). Garden City: Doubleday, 1968.
- Thomas Thompson (California). *Blood and Money* (setting is Houston). Garden City: Doubleday, 1976.
- Frank X. Tolbert (Dallas). *Dick Dowling at Sabine Pass*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962.
- David Westheimer (California). *Summer on the Water* (setting is on the Gulf Coast in Houston area). New York: Macmillan, 1948. ♣



Then, following a calculated script, she and the great horse burst forth, an exquisite duet in gray, demanding every eye in the house as a pair of superb dancers do when they seize a stage. Suddenly there was no other horse or rider in the ring. At the end of the evening Joan Robinson and Beloved Belinda swept the boards, and the crowd rose in emotional standing ovation. (Thompson, Thomas. *Blood and Money*. New York: Doubleday, 1976. Houston is the setting for the novel.)

A newspaperman wrote, "When Joan Robinson rides Beloved Belinda it is one of the most achingly beautiful sights in the world. It is a poem, a waltz, it is the sculpture of Rodin and the painting of Cezanne. My goosepimples get goosepimples."

Who Teaches Folklore in Texas?

The teaching of folklore is a two-sided issue. At the college and secondary levels, folklore is generally presented as a separate course of study with emphasis on theories of origin, transmission, function, and variation of traditions. But professional folklorists—those with graduate degrees in the field—have not paid much attention to pedagogy. Occasionally a session at a state or national meeting of folklorists has concerned teaching problems and techniques, but not often. The other approach to the teaching of folklore is using the material to provide motivation, relevance, and cultural enrichment in other courses, especially language arts and social studies. This takes place primarily on the elementary and secondary levels. The training of those who teach folklore in public schools varies so widely that generalizations are almost impossible to make. The overall result is very idiosyncratic teaching of folklore, not only in Texas, but throughout the country.

This issue of *English in Texas* examines the teaching of folklore in both of these contexts—as a separate discipline and as supporting enrichment material. And because folklore in Texas is so closely identified with English departments, we will emphasize the relationship of folklore with both literature and rhetoric/composition, as the classified bibliography points out.

An assessment of the “state of the art” of teaching folklore in Texas is problematical. Complete and reliable data are unavailable right now; nobody has a clear overview of all that is being done involving folklore in the schools throughout the state. So the first problem we must face squarely is figuring out a way to reach all those people who are actively involved with folklore. Who are they? Where are they? What are they doing?

Another service this issue can serve is providing some guidance and assistance to those public school teachers who find themselves dealing with folklore in the classroom but who have not had any professional training in the field. The

classified bibliography is intended primarily for these readers.

It is, however, beyond the scope of this journal to address the larger theoretical question of what folklore is. Neither do we have space to debate whether or not folklore is a worthwhile intellectual pursuit for our students. These problems certainly deserve examination and dialogue, perhaps in another issue or article. But for our immediate purposes, we will be concerned with surveying what is going on in our schools right now rather than hypothesizing about what ought to be done.

FOLKLORE IN TEXAS

Texas has an incredibly rich folk heritage. Folklore is woven throughout the very history of the state—the settlement of the frontier, interplay of various ethnic groups, independence as a republic—as well as being an integral part of its colorful economic development, ranging from the cattle empires to its booming oilfields. By the turn of the century, intellectuals of the stature of George Lyman Kittredge of Harvard and some university professors recognized the need to preserve and document this colorful heritage. The University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University spearheaded this effort by supporting the work of those who were involved in folklore-related research. John Lomax, the foremost collector of Texas folksongs, taught at A&M before returning to Austin to direct the Ex-Students Association. And when the Texas Folklore Society was founded at the 1909 meeting of the Texas State Teachers Association in Dallas by professors from these two institutions, Lomax was named secretary. The first meeting of the T. F. S. was held in 1911 at the University of Texas with Leonidas W. Payne, Jr., officiating. J. Frank Dobie, dean of Texas folklorists, became secretary-editor of the T. F. S. in 1923 while he was on the English faculty at U. T. And in the 1930s, U. T. and A&M collaborated to support the

fieldwork of William A. Owens, who was collecting Texas folksongs.

FOLKLORE AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Today the colleges and universities throughout the state are less concerned with the documentation of Texas traditions than they are with actual instruction in the discipline. There is no coordinated effort in the state to supervise or keep a record of which Texas colleges offer folklore courses. But Ron Baker of Indiana State University recently attempted to compile a list of all the colleges in the United States which offer folklore (JAF 91, 1977). The following Texas universities responded affirmatively to his questionnaire: Abilene Christian, Angelo State (San Angelo), University of Dallas (Irving), East Texas State University (Commerce and Texarkana), Hardin-Simmons (Abilene), University of Houston, Midwestern State (Wichita Falls), North Texas State (Denton), Rice (Houston), Southwest Texas State (San Marcos), Stephen F. Austin (Nacogdoches), Tarleton State (Stephenville), Texas A&I (Kingsville and Laredo), TAMU (College Station), Texas Tech (Lubbock), University of Texas (Austin, El Paso), Texas Woman's University (Denton), Trinity (San Antonio), and West Texas State (Canyon).

The majority of these institutions offer folklore courses through their English departments and emphasize the literary affiliations of ballad and oral tradition. The University of Texas at Austin has the most comprehensive folklore program, administered through the Center for Intercultural Studies in Folklore and Ethnomusicology, created in 1966 and now under the direction of Richard Bauman. This graduate program consists of two alternative tracks: M.A. and Ph.D. anthropology emphasis and Ph.D. English emphasis. It is one of four folklore Ph.D. programs in the United States (the others are at Indiana University, University of Pennsylvania, and most

recently, U. C. L. A.). According to current statistics, no other Texas university offers a graduate concentration in folklife studies. The Center co-sponsored the Texas Folk Arts Survey with the National Endowment for the Arts in 1977, an attempt to locate active practitioners of folklore and folklife, but the results are not yet available.

FOLKLORE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Less is known about folklore instruction on the primary and secondary levels in the state than in the universities because no comprehensive survey has been attempted. Furthermore, it is in the public schools that most of the folklore "enrichment" teaching takes place so folklore is not regarded as a separate course of study in these schools. Since folklore is not an official teaching field recognized by the Texas Education Agency, it is difficult to keep accurate records on when and where and how folklore is being taught.

Nevertheless, folklore is offered as an English elective in some high schools. These courses use folklore materials as the basis of research, composition, and creative writing. Jim Leeper teaches a course at Midland High School called "Folklife Composition," which has the following description:

Folklore is a course in which the student will study cultural customs, traditions, and mores to examine their worth. The student will discover what people believe, how they act, and how they live in various groups. He will research various periodicals, especially the newspaper, for folklife material. He will synthesize his findings to determine how these things apply to his present culture. The student will determine how legends, songs, customs, and various other forms of lore will reveal the character of a people. He will determine how these aspects have affected the literature of our country.

One of the most creative offshoots of these high school English department folklore courses is the publication of student writing and photography in magazines and journals based on the *Foxfire* model. *Foxfire* is an incredibly successful journal founded by Eliot Wigginton and produced by his students in Rabun Gap, Georgia. The magazine features regional folklife and local people as documented by high school students. This idea has spread throughout the country and Texas has many such publications: *Chinquapin* of Douglass High School, Douglass; *Lob-*

lolly of Gary High School, Gary; and *Black Gold* of Panola Junior College's Communication Department, Carthage; and *Saltgrass*, Alvin. There may be other such publications, but information on a state-wide basis is sketchy.

FOLKLORE OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Because folklife is such a vital part of Texas history and culture, innumerable organizations and institutions deal with it on a variety of levels. In 1977 the Institute of Texas Cultures, Texas Folklore Society, and Folklore Center of the University of Texas co-sponsored a symposium, "conference on Folk Culture in Texas: Preservation and Presentation." This meeting attempted to bring together as many representatives as possible in the state who were actively involved with folklore and folklife, ranging from administrators of museums and archives to the director of the Texas State Agricultural Extension Service. The main benefit of the meeting was providing an opportunity for all these people to come into direct contact with each other to explain what they do.

The Institute of Texas Cultures at San Antonio is a primary presenter of Texas folklife through its museum, publications, and special exhibits. The Institute also sponsors the popular annual Festival of Texas Folklife which showcases various ethnic groups.

The Texas Folklore Society publishes a yearbook containing articles dealing primarily with state traditions, the most recent of which is Volume 42 (1979), *Built in Texas*. The Society's annual meeting is held in various cities throughout the state during the Easter weekend.

Another state agency which deals with folklife on a regular basis is the Texas Commission for the Humanities, a fund granting agency which works closely with the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory of Austin administered the Children's Folklore Project with the University of Texas Folklore Center from 1973-1977 to develop educational programs and materials for use in multicultural classrooms. The summer Texas History Institute for teachers of Texas history, sponsored by the Texas State Historical Association and the University of Texas, includes a seminar on folklore. Academic associations with special folklore sections at their annual meetings are the Texas State Historical Association and the

South-Central Modern Language Association. There are also several publishers in the state which specialize in Texana, including folklore. These publishers are listed in *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society* 41 (1978): 167-177.

We Texans are not alone in our attempts to find out more concerning the presentation and preservation of folklore in our public schools and other state institutions. Folklorists and educators throughout the country recognize that a tremendous information gap exists. As Lynda Burack stated in her preface to *Keystone Folklore's* special issue on folklore and education,

The current surge of involvement in folklore and education is visible within the realms of at least two prestigious national organizations . . . The possibility of formulating an ad hoc committee on folklore and education within the Council on Anthropology and Education is being explored. Under the impetus of . . . the Minnesota Folklife Center a petition for the creation of a committee on folklore and education is being presented to the executive board of the American Folklore Society (pp. 13-14).

The State of the Profession Committee of the American Folklore Society has also formed a special sub-committee to investigate this problem. The current interest in children's folklore, spurred in part by the United Nations Year of the Child, has also generated new concern for the role of folklore in education.

In Texas, the study of folklore is being pursued on multiple levels, not only throughout our school systems but also by state and federally supported agencies. With this widespread involvement of so many concerned individuals and organizations, a new sense of purpose and direction may emerge.

This article is a preliminary survey of some of these efforts, an attempt to document what we know about the current situation regarding folklore and the schools. The next step is a state-wide, coordinated effort to locate all of the schools in the state—on any level—where folklore is being taught. Once such a list is developed, then we can go on to evaluate the overall effectiveness of folklore instruction. We can learn from some, provide much-needed guidance and assistance for others.

English in Texas has taken a first step. Who will undertake the next phase of this project?

Folklore and Education: A Classified Bibliography

Educators and folklorists have published a number of articles on various aspects of using folklore in the classroom, at all levels from kindergarten through the university and adult education programs. Of course these articles vary in quality and usefulness, but it is also worthwhile and interesting to see them all listed together. In this way an overview of consistent areas of concern over the years begins to come clear.

The following bibliography is classified primarily according to the needs and interests of English teachers, but other articles involving folklore and pedagogy have also been included.

Three other journals have already published special issues devoted to the topic of folklore and the classroom, and these deserve special mention. They are "Perspectives on Folklore and Education," *Folklore Forum*, Bibliographic and Special Series No. 2 (1969); "Focus on Folklore," *Indiana English Journal* 11:2 (Winter, 1976-77); and "Folklore and Education," *Keystone Folklore* 22:1-2 (1978).

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Folklore Textbooks

Compared with other fields of study, there are not many folklore textbooks on the market. And although the selection for college use is quite limited, the real problem is a lack of satisfactory textbooks from which to choose for the secondary level. The following list covers most of the books currently used in upper-level folklore classes:

Brunvand, Jan H. *Folklore: A Study and Research Guide*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976.

This short paperback (144 pp.) is intended primarily to assist students doing research papers in folklore classes. Chapter 1, "The Subject in Context," surveys the leading folklore theories and scholars of the past and present. Chapter 2, "Reference Guide," summarizes the library sources available to the student of folklore. Chapter 3, "The Research Paper," is a concise guide for actually writing a folklore research paper based, in part, on tape-recorded interviews. A glossary of terms and index of authors complete the volume.

Brunvand, Jan H. *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*. 2nd edition. New York: W. W. Norton, 1978.

The Study of American Folklore is regarded by many teachers as the best introductory folklore text partly because of the excellent bibliographic essays which accompany each chapter. Because of its wide-spread use, Brunvand's definition of folklore has become fairly standardized among undergraduates. In addition to the informative introduction, the main sections of the book deal with oral folklore, customary folklore, and material folk traditions. There are also four excellent appendices by professional folklorists to serve as models for student research papers.

Brunvand, Jan H. *Readings in American Folklore*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1979.

This collection of thirty-six articles with headnotes is designed for use in undergraduate folklore classes. The range and scope of the selections is wide enough to provide supplementary reading throughout the semester. The anthology also solves the problems of trying to teach folklore in small colleges which lack breadth in their library holdings, especially journals. The titles of the sections are "Collections of American Folk Materials," "Folklore in Context," "Analysis and Interpretation of American Folklore," and "Some Theoretical Perspectives in American Folklore."

Dorson, Richard M. *American Folklore*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959.

This book reflects the author's training as a historian, starting with colonial folklore and concluding with modern or contemporary folklore. Intervening chapters are devoted to distinctive folk groups and folk regions such as the Pennsylvania Germans, the Ozarks, Spanish New Mexico, Utah Mormons, and Maine Coast Yankees. The bibliographic notes, although somewhat dated, are nevertheless quite useful.

Dorson, Richard M. *Buying the Wind: Regional Folklore in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

The selections of field-collected lore in this book are intended basically as examples to support Dorson's other textbook, *American Folklore*. The folk groups represented are Maine Down-Easters, Pennsylvania Dutchmen, Southern Mountaineers, Louisiana Cajuns, Illinois Egyptians, Southwest Mexicans, and Utah Mormons.

Dorson, Richard M. ed., *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

This anthology of twenty-six articles by some of the leading folklorists of America and Europe is sophisticated enough to use in graduate folklore courses but too advanced for most undergraduates. The book is divided into two basic parts: "The Fields of Folklife Studies" and "The Methods of Folklife Studies." Oral folklore, social folk custom, material culture, and folk arts are the general topics covered by Part One. Part Two deals with fieldwork, archiving, library research, atlases, museums, and cultural geography. Each chapter contains a basic reading list.

Dundes, Alan, ed. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

Thirty-four articles are anthologized in *The Study of Folklore* and each has an excellent explanatory headnote written by Dundes. The readings are best suited to more

advanced classes, rather than to general, introductory survey courses.

Katz, Elaine. *Folklore for the Time of Your Life*. Birmingham, Alabama: Oxmoor House, 1978.

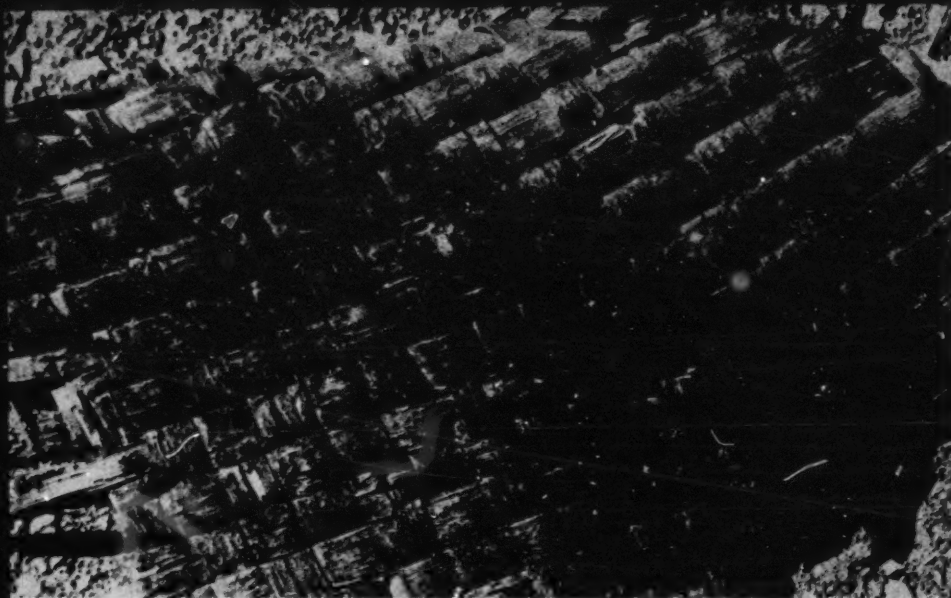
A newcomer to the market, *Folklore for the Time of Your Life* is a bit more nostalgic and romanticized than the other available textbooks. The chapters deal primarily with fieldwork and collecting in the American South. The chapters lack notes, but there is a bibliography.

Tallman, Richard and Laura Tallman. *Country Folks: A Handbook for Student Folklore Collectors*. Batesville, Arkansas: Arkansas College Folklore Archive Publications, 1978.

This is the only really suitable textbook currently available for high school students. Its writing was funded, in part, by the U. S. Office of Education. The chapter headings include "Folklore and Folklorists," "Collecting Folklore," and "Topics for Folklore Collecting." There is also an appendix about archiving and indexing. Chapter 4, "To the Teacher," is especially valuable for a teacher confronted with instructing a folklore class for the first time.

Toelken, Barre. *The Dynamics of Folklore*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

The author summarizes the aim of this book best in the opening sentences of his preface: "Most folklorists, and most folklore textbooks, have paid more attention to the items of folklore than to the live processes by and through which folklore is produced. This has led at least one folklorist to lament recently that folklore scholarship tends to 'dehumanize' folklore. Briefly put, this book is an attempt to provide a partial remedy for that situation by urging a basic attitude toward folklore study that stresses 'the folk' and the dynamics of their traditional expressions." ♦



Mat of sotol yucca from period of Basketmakers.



Fibers of agave made into twine for sandals.

Peggy Skaggs
Angelo State University,
San Angelo

My Secret



Ocotillo thorns used to puncture skin to relieve swelling.

I have a secret. Each semester I groan along with my colleagues over the burden of grading term papers. But my secret lightens the chore enormously and actually causes me to look forward to reading numbers of papers.

The collecting project done by the students in my American folklore class is my secret. This project does not produce all "A+" papers, either in form or content. But it always produces papers that are lively, off-beat, and informative. Papers about kissing games, water-witching, rodeo lore, fetishes, and the like.

Good results depend, I have found,

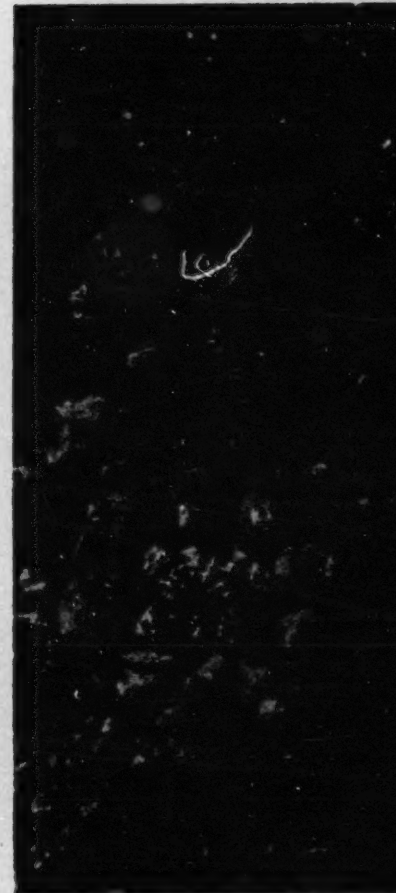
Basket started with spines of Devil's Pin Cushion.



Juice from century plant to remove warts.



Tea from leaves of creosote bush for back pains and gall stones.



Sliced peyote placed on head for fever.

upon my making the assignment very specific. Since the students have never done a similar project, they often feel quite insecure; the more specific and exact the terms of the assignment, the more comfortable they feel about it and the better the results they produce.

Students enjoy collecting Texas folklore; in fact, many even enjoy writing the reports about their collections. They also feel that their work helps them to understand themselves and others better and, in some cases, to contribute to the preservation of valuable aspects of Texan culture. But success with this assignment does not require that students be trained folklorists by any means; in fact only minimal explanations are required to adapt the

assignment to any composition class.

Following is a copy of the assignment I gave my upper-level students most recently. One of the papers it produced that encouraged me to share my secret with readers of *English in Texas* was Russel G. Skiles's "Uses of Native Plants in the Langtry, Texas, Area." The photographs above were selected from the series that accompanied his paper.

TERM PROJECT ASSIGNMENT

1. Topic must be approved. First request will reserve the topic. (To make oral reports more interesting.)
2. Primary (collecting) research is required.

3. Secondary (library) research is permissible. For some topics, it will be necessary.

4. All research (primary and secondary) must be carefully *documented*.

5. Length of written reports may vary considerably, depending upon the topic.

6. Oral reports during the last two weeks will be based upon written reports but should *not* be a mere reading of the written report.

7. Some kind of audio or visual aid is required for oral reports.

8. I plan to keep a copy of your paper for the archives we hope to establish at ASU; be sure to prepare a duplicate copy. ♣

Folklore as a Critical Approach to Fiction

Unlike some approaches to the study of literature, a folklore approach affords an opportunity to examine the created world of the artist and the perceived world of a particular folk group. Whereas other critical approaches may rely exclusively upon the work itself or upon the artist's life in relation to the work or upon the work in a historical context, the folklore approach gives the student a sense of immediacy. Although folklore deals with the present and the past, the student of folklore studies a culture at a level that the historian (political, literary, or otherwise) usually excludes, for he studies the culture of the folk, the culture of the ordinary people whose lives on geographic or ideological islands exclude them from the scrutiny of the historian of the national mainstream. Thus, the student of folklore in literature examines not only the work as artistic creation; he also considers the work as a reflection of culture.

Not too surprisingly, since the study of folklore as a critical apparatus is a comparatively new academic pursuit, relatively little has been written about the literary artist's use of folklore.

One important book on the subject is Daniel Hoffman's *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961). Hoffman writes that "folklore has long been recognized in American writing, as elsewhere, as an element in the minor tradition of local color literature" (p. x). Hoffman adds that folklore is also used by such writers as Hawthorne, Melville, and Twain, and that it contributes "to their major writings at a pitch of first intensity concepts of character, of theme, of action, of language" (p. x).

Hoffman's book is one of the most important critical works dealing with the uses of folklore in American fiction. He appears, however, to put American fiction into one of two categories. At one extreme are the major writers like Haw-

thorne, Melville, and Twain. At the other extreme are the local colorists like Harte and Cable, mostly writers of short fiction during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hoffman leaves no room between these extremes for writers who can be identified with a region and yet write for a wide audience and contribute fiction that finally must be considered significant. Hoffman concludes, "We can trace three levels of significance in the literary uses of folk materials" (p. 20). First, folklore may be used simply to give the work the illusion of reality. Second, some works may be "merely folk stories or tall tales unified and elaborated by literary redactors." Third, folklore may be "brought into the service of art," when the writer "places his folk custom in its dynamic relation to the culture of the larger social unit of which the folk group is a part" (pp. 20-21).

Writing for the same symposium that produced Hoffman's article, Richard Dorson identifies certain flaws that have impaired the studies of folklore in American literature and he suggests approaches which can establish the presence of folklore ("The Identification of Folklore in American Literature," *Journal of American Folklore* 70 [1957]:1-8). Dorson suggests that the flaws in the criticism at present can be counteracted if the critic makes use of three kinds of evidence: (1) "biographical evidence" showing the author was in "contact with oral lore"; (2) "internal evidence in the literary composition itself, that indicates direct familiarity of the author with folklore"; and (3) "corroborative evidence to supplement his proofs from biographical and internal evidence" (pp. 5-7).

One critic Dorson attacks for having misused the concept of folklore is Ernest Leisy. In "Folklore in American Literature," Leisy writes that almost every American writer, from Brackenridge to Steinbeck, "made consistent use of folklore in his writings" (*College English* 8

[1946]:122-29). In "Folklore in American Prose," Leisy writes further of how the folk ideas of "New Canaan" and the "frontier" and "our hero" have influenced prose (*Saturday Review of Literature* 34 [21 July 1951]:6-7, 32). Dorson would consider such subjects far down the line of priorities for the critic dealing with folklore in literature because they are abstract subjects which would be difficult to verify as being property of the folk.

Dorson's approach presents problems for the student of the literary uses of folklore. For instance, he would minimize the importance of such an abstract subject as how a folk belief might influence the structure of a short story or novel. Hoffman's book ranges to the other extreme. In *Form and Fable in American Fiction*, he makes a thorough investigation into the abstract influences of folklore on the fiction writer. It is by way of a middle ground, making use of the approaches of both Dorson and Hoffman, that this paper will consider the uses of folklore in William A. Owens' *Look to the River*.

To begin, Owens employs a typically American motif—in the following discussion referred to as the "road motif"—and his short novel has "the tone of a folk tale" (Doris Grumbach, review of *Look to the River in America*, 3 March 1963, p. 346).

The road has been a traditional symbol of escape in American literature, and the symbol may have its roots in folk belief. From Brackenridge (where the road is like Don Quixote's) to Twain (where the river is a road to adulthood) to Kerouac (where the road is a symbol of rebellion), American writers have used the road as a means to adventure, maturity, and inner peace. The road is, in fact, a traditional American folk symbol.

Further, the novel is an initiation story, a story of the maturing of young Jed, and Owens associates the road with Jed's steps toward maturity. At the begin-

ning Jed has taken his first step in growing up—leaving home—and Owens first refers to the road: "In January he had come walking up the road from the Red River bottoms . . ." (*Look to the River* [New York: Atheneum, 1963], p. 5). All future references to the road deal with steps in growing up. Movement of just any type does not indicate a step to maturity; it must be movement associated with the road. Jed is hired by Basil and Cannie to run through their cornfield to keep out blackbirds. When a peddler comes to the farm, Jed sees a chance to escape from the farm life and, in effect, take another step toward adulthood. His next step, like the previous, is associated with being on the road, this time with the peddler, John.

Jed must postpone leaving with John, however, until fall but is "bound" to the peddler by the gift of a watch. When John leaves, Basil, discovering the watch, accuses Jed of stealing it. Jed leaves to find John to prove his innocence. "Past midnight, Jed walked steadily on, following the road up hill and down, feeling the wagon ruts under his feet . . ." (p. 60). While Jed stays on the road, he makes progress catching John. When he gets off the road, he is slowed. When he must leave the road to avoid a chain gang, Owens writes, "His steps grew slower and slower. His feet bogged in the soft earth" (p. 74).

Jed is captured by a "trusty" on the chain gang who believes Jed guilty of wrongdoing: "When he went on he didn't stick to the public road, like he was a-scared to stick to the public road" (p. 81). Later, a convict tries to sing a song about Jed and the song begins, "Red road, hooper, don't stay away, / Red road, hooper, don't stay away" (p. 109). The song further identifies Jed with the road.

When a young black friend, Luster, tells Jed of plans to escape the chain gang, he says, "We'll hit the road any time you say" (p. 113). Jed escapes taking Luster with him, but he can make no progress when he is off the road. The "Cap'n" catches him but releases him when they meet John on the road going back to the chain gang. John returns with Jed to the farm and pays for Jed's release from Basil and Cannie. Jed runs once more in the cornfield and the book concludes with Jed waiting for morning when he can leave:

With nothing to do but wait, Jed lay on the pallet and covered himself with the quilt. Then he held the watch dial before his eyes and counted the hours till they would be on the road (p. 185).

Thus, Owens makes use of a major folk motif in his novel of the maturation of Jed. It is interesting, chronologically, that Owens wrote the novel soon after the so-called "beat movement" of the 1950s, when the road was a symbol of rebellion and independence for a new generation of Americans. It is a natural symbol for a country whose history has been stretched along roads leading toward an expanding western frontier.

A second general consideration of Owens' debt to folklore in the writing of *Look to the River* needs examination. When it was first published, some reviewers suggested that the story has the tone of a folktale (Grumbach, p. 346). Although little has been written on what constitutes the tone of a folktale because the folktale takes so many different forms—from fairy tales to animal tales to jests—some generalizations can be made about the tone of the American folktale.

First, the American folktale, especially the modern folktale, tends to fall into what Stith Thompson calls the "simple tale," the jest or anecdote: "a tale need by no means be complex in order to form a strong tradition" (*The Folktale* [New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1946], p. 188). Certainly, Owens' *Look to the River* is an American folktale in its simplicity. A boy is hired by a farming couple, and he leaves the couple to travel with a peddler.

Simplicity alone, however, would not warrant saying Owens' story is similar to the folktale. In the folktale, the teller's first intent is to entertain. Although much may be read into *Look to the River* (it may be read allegorically with Jed personifying innocence or inexperience), it is obvious that Owens wants to tell a story that the reader will enjoy at enjoyment's simplest level. Grumbach writes that "There is no discernible moral to the tale . . . It tells a story, but proves nothing . . ." (p. 346). If the teller of a folktale wishes to instruct, instruction is always secondary to entertainment, always secondary to plot.

Not only does the teller of a folktale want to entertain, but he does it informally. In *Look to the River* there is simple diction in both narrative and dialog in the novel. The story moves at a casual and easy rhythm from the beginning when Owens opens his tale without elaborate setting: "Corn and blackbirds don't mix," Basil had said the first morning the young corn began to show through the red sandy earth" (p. 3).

The mood of the folktale ranges from serious to humorous, with the American folktale tending to be amusing. It may employ a wide range of devices to achieve humor, from slapstick to satire. In *Look to the River*, Owens makes use of folk humor. Still on the subject of "corn and blackbirds," Owens has Basil say, "They don't mix a-tall, unless'n it's in the blackbird's craw" (p. 3). Owens also makes use of both slapstick and satire in his chapters where Jed is held with the chain gang. One Negro convict does some "jigging" for the "Cap'n" just after a Negro trusty sang to a white convict:

If I had my druthers,
I'll tell you if I can,
I'd druther be a nigger
Than a po' white man (p. 94).

In conclusion, Owens makes use of various folk elements in *Look to the River*. The novel is indebted to folklore for the "road motif" and for the tone of the story. William T. Pilkington writes of folklore in all of Owens' stories: "And indeed when one reads Owens' fiction, he finds it sprinkled with folk songs and sayings, with folk motifs which often provide thematic continuity" (*William A. Owens*, Southwest Writers Series, No. 17 [Austin, Tex.: Steck-Vaughn, 1968], p. 11).

To quote Grumbach further: [The book has] "all the customary elements of folk literature: a wandering hero of impeccable honor, a mysterious peddler (literally, a 'wandering Jew') who offers to join forces with the boy, a series of adventures in which the boy's virtue is tried, and a picturesque progress during which misunderstanding, viciousness and men's ill will are explored through the boy's eyes. And, like many folk tales in this genre, this one is heavy with local color and colloquialism" (p. 346).

The work has the tone of a folktale, a simplicity of plot, an emphasis upon entertainment, an air of informality, and a humorous mood—all of which characterize the traditional folktale. The folk elements range in complexity in Owens' work from those which simply add verisimilitude to those which contribute to the theme. Whatever the degree of complexity, the folklore has contributed to the critical acclaim and popular acceptance of Owens' novel. But most important for the student of literature is the use of folklore as a valid critical apparatus for understanding fiction. ♣

Beyond Rabun Gap and *Foxfire* to Albany and *Old Timer*

The mean distance west from Fort Worth of Shackelford County is about one hundred twenty-five miles. Natives of Pecos or Deaf Smith counties might smile at the idea, but Shackelford in the minds of its people, particularly its young people, is West Texas and always has been. This concept and portrayal of a region, and much more, is embodied in a series of investigations into the heritage of Shackelford County called *Old Timer*. Published between 1975-78, the series is an extracurricular project of Albany high school students in commemoration of the Bicentennial. There are six magazine-format *Old Timer* issues in all, averaging about seventy pages each, handsomely printed on slick paper and saddle stitched by the *Albany News*.

As a means of getting young people involved in recovering and appreciating the past of their region and its survival into the present, the series is eminently worthwhile and should serve as a stimulus to other young people for similar endeavors. Two of the contributions were nationally recognized by publication in the Bicentennial issue of *Foxfire*. That the schoolboys and girls of Shackelford County had the initiative and energy to undertake and complete such a project speaks highly of them and their sponsors.

The value of *Old Timer* extends

beyond Shackelford County. Everyone interested in the life, past and present, of those regions of Texas where oil and cattle have formed the economic base for the lives of the people will find something of interest. The wide range of subject matter—persons, places, events, occupations, folkways, the whole fabric of the life of a region—indicates understanding and appreciation of their heritage on the part of the participants in the project.

The quality and general interest of the submissions vary, but the researchers and interviewers did their work with zest and zeal. Among the contents are numerous accounts of how people made a living, the occupations ranging from prosaic to exotic, the people from prominent to obscure: masons and oil-tank builders among the artisans; cowboys and ranchers; lawmen and other public officials; editors, teachers, and preachers; business men and women; bee-keepers and soldiers. Some are from the past (which seems more distant to the young writers than to those of us into our second half century); some are alive and living in Shackelford County.

Events include such materials of local history and folklore as lynchings, robberies, shoot-outs, and floods (of which Albany, the county seat, has had more than its share). Old homes and buildings,

ghost towns, abandoned schools, early cemeteries and bridges, and allegedly curative mineral springs are featured. There are articles on quilting and quilting bees, parties and playtimes, musical groups and minstrel shows, home remedies and treatments—including an account by a man who as a boy was bit by a rattlesnake and “did everything wrong”: ran to his home, drank some whiskey, and waited hours for belated and dubious medical attention, but lived to tell the tale—and on the death of six members of one family from smallpox spread by a man who, dying himself, got off the train in Albany.

We learn that the slogan of the *Albany News* was “The hen, the cow and the sow” before editor Dick McCarty coined the more glamorous phrase “Home of the Hereford,” which Albany adopted. The role of earlier, more primitive bovines in Shackelford County history is well known—Fort Griffin was a major way-station on the Western Trail among other functions—and this is recognized. There is scant Fort Griffin material, however, probably designedly so. The young researchers and interviewers confined themselves to what they could do best.

One of the best features is the wealth of pictures. Averaging several per page, they nicely complement the accom-



panying articles and in many cases tell the story better than words can. The English teacher may then question, with Eliot Wigginton, in the introduction to *The Foxfire Book* (New York: Anchor Books, pp. 13, 14), "Is the subject, English, ignored in the process? Hardly. In fact, the opposite is true. English, in its simplest definition, is communication—reaching out and touching people with words, sounds and visual images. We are in the business of improving students' prowess in these areas. In their work with photography (which must tell the story with as much impact and clarity as the words), text (which must be grammatically correct except in the use of pure dialect from tapes that they transcribe), lay-out, make-up, correspondence, art and cover design, and selection of manuscripts from outside poets and writers—to say nothing of related skills such as fund raising, typing, retailing, advertising, and speaking at conferences and public meetings—they learn more about English than from any other curriculum I could devise. Moreover, this curriculum has built-in motivations and immediate and tangible rewards."

The sample here gives some idea of the value of the project. The whole endeavor is one with which the many hands at work on it did themselves proud.

BURIED TREASURE

Eight miles south of Albany stands the oldest surviving structure in Shackelford County. This building, known as the Greer House, stands today atop a windy hill as a sentinel would stand, not bothered by time or weather. The house, built of rock, was erected in 1861 by George Washington Greer from rocks quarried at nearby Hubbard Creek. The structure is two stories high with the stairway entrance on the outside. Although the roof is now gone, the foundation is solid and the walls are sound.

Across a small gulley is the oldest known grave in Shackelford County. This Greer family cemetery is also atop a hill and the headstones have weathered very little since they were erected.

The Greer place is located near what was once the Western Trail. Cattle drives were so frequent that the dust of one drive would hardly settle before another came through.

One of these drives was a combined herd belonging to two cattlemen from San Antonio who trailed to Kansas. There they sold their cattle for \$90,000 in gold and with it started the long treacherous journey home. While coming back, they got the feeling someone was following them and would try to steal their money.

After some discussion, they decided the safe and smart thing to do was bury it. So they found a good spot, dug a hole and buried their gold in it. To make sure they could find it when they came back, they carved an arrow in an oak tree which pointed to the small cache.

Years later several maps turned up, as treasure maps do, saying that the gold was a day's ride from Fort Griffin on Hubbard Creek which led to the Greer place. About sixty years ago, the father of S. C. Tollett of Moran reportedly found the carved tree. So many people were looking for the gold that he took his knife, carved around the arrow and took it out to keep people from bothering him. He never did find it himself. The field was in cultivation at the time and people came with teams and fresnos to look for the gold. They tore up the country so bad, it had to be taken out of cultivation.

Up until the last few years, people still dug for that gold. They dug around every old oak there, or that could be remembered standing in a certain spot by old timers. The gold, if it was ever there and if it has not been secretly found, is still there waiting for some lucky soldier of fortune.

Temple Wiloth and Rebecca Pilcher

